

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A STERN CHASE.

A STORY IN THREE PARTS.

By MRS. CASHEL HOEY.

THE SECOND PART.

CHAPTER IV. NIGHT-WATCHES.

DR. ROSSLYN'S professional instincts were always strong enough to get the better of any other impulses or feelings, with which they might be brought into conflict by circumstances. This law of his being, to which, doubtless, his success was largely owing, was not abrogated to the disadvantage of his own household. A patient within his own gates, or those of any other person, would always receive his attention and consideration as a patient first, let there be what other relation there might between that individual and himself. Therefore, when Liliat faltered out her confession that she had received later news of Hugh than she had acknowledged to him, he controlled, in obedience to his invariable rule, the surprise which he felt. If Liliat had not behaved well in this matter, Liliat was ill, and likely, he feared, to be worse; it was with her illness and not with her fault that he was called upon immediately to deal.

"Don't agitate yourself, my dear," he said; "there's nothing to blame yourself for. I have never been inquisitive about the correspondence between you and Hugh. You told me no falsehood; I did not enquire until the last mail but one whether you had heard from him."

"I know you did not, papa; but I—I kept it from you, and I am so frightened because there is no letter from Hugh this time."

"But you ought to be less instead of more uneasy," urged Dr. Rosslyn, observing with concern the dilated eyes, changing colour,

and ceaseless tremor which indicated the nervous excitement under which Liliat was labouring. "You see he has missed only two mails instead of three, as I reckoned it. So many things may account for that. Even when I thought it was three I was not alarmed, and two really don't signify. You must not let yourself get so much excited about this, my dear. I must have you taken upstairs now, and I will send for a composing-draught. I shall see you before I go out, and in the meantime you must be quiet."

The habitual obedience of Liliat, which would in any case have prevented her from questioning her stepfather's instructions, was aided now by her weakness. She was physically unable to explain to Dr. Rosslyn, even if he would have allowed her to do so, why it was that the fact of her having received the letter from Hugh of three mails back rendered his subsequent silence so terrifying. It must be explained, she knew, but she would have to rest first and to think; she was not yet able to do the latter. The faintness had passed off; the tears had relieved her, but there was a strange sensation about her head and her limbs, and she felt that if she were now to go on speaking, she should not be sure of uttering the words she intended to say. She therefore silently submitted to being taken up to her room, and laid on her bed, only adding to Dr. Rosslyn's orders a request on her own behalf, that she might be allowed to remain quite alone.

Mrs. Norton returned to the doctor, when she had left Liliat lying in the darkened room with a dreadful thumping in her head, and innumerable pulses beating all over her body, and was cross-questioned by him respecting the girl's recent health and spirits. Her report was not, perhaps, very intelligent, but it was tolerably

satisfactory. Mrs. Norton had not seen much amiss with Liliás until yesterday; she had been very well while Julian Courtland was with them; but after he was gone had begun to fidget, and Mrs. Norton had noticed that she was pale last night.

"Look after her carefully," said Dr. Rosslyn; "I fear there's something more than a fainting-fit wrong with her."

That was a busy morning at the dull house in Harley Street. The doctor's "persons of importance" were beginning to go out of town, and some of them were not of such utterly established importance as to render it indispensable that the doctor should make a valedictory call upon them and not they upon the doctor. Casual patients, too, assisted to fill up Dr. Rosslyn's time, and some hours elapsed before he was free to go up to Liliás's room and ascertain what the effect of the composing-draught had been. As he passed the door of the drawing-room Mrs. Norton came out and told him that Liliás, after taking the medicine, had again begged to be left alone. He found her sleeping, but not restfully, and with a look of trouble on her face.

While he was making his professional calls that afternoon, Dr. Rosslyn thought a good deal over the illness of Liliás, and the incident of the letter of which he had not been told. He could find but one interpretation of the latter, and he was the more easily satisfied to accept that one without looking beyond it, because it fell in with his own wishes. The correspondence was that of lovers; the sister and brother fallacy was already exploded; the event he most desired was about to be accomplished, if not precisely in the way he would have chosen, in a way which was natural and blameless. No doubt the young people had thought it wiser to put off any communication to be made to him on the subject until Hugh's return, and he was not disposed to find fault with them for that. There was not a great deal of romance to be extracted from an engagement between a young man and a girl in the relative positions of Hugh and Liliás, and that they should supplement the little that existed by keeping the love-affair strictly to themselves for a while, was neither surprising nor displeasing to the doctor. Of course Liliás could never be quite sure that he would not ask to see a letter of Hugh's, and no doubt the unavowed one contained something very particular; something, it might be, with

reference to himself, which was meant for her eyes only. In fact, Dr. Rosslyn was too well pleased with his own reading of the agitation of Liliás, to do more than admit that she had not behaved quite well.

That Hugh was all right enough he had not the least doubt; but his forgetfulness, carelessness, obliviousness of the flight of time, or some other heedless hindrance, had done mischief. Liliás had enjoyed even good health, but she resembled her mother in the sensitiveness which made any mental disturbance tell upon her physical condition. Dr. Rosslyn hoped that the explanation of Hugh's silence might prove to be that he was on his way home, and, on reflection, he was inclined to believe that they should soon hear of him from some European sanctuary of art; "some paint and plaster place," was the doctor's scornful equivalent.

Dr. Rosslyn had a fully-occupied afternoon. He carried his professional manner among several households where his coming was awaited either with fear or hope, or with the mere idle expectation of the fanciful invalid who has a superfluity of leisure and money; and he returned to his house in Harley Street at the usual hour. Before he had time to enquire how Liliás was, he was met by a request that he would go up and see her.

"I can't make her out," said Mrs. Norton, coming out of Liliás's room, where she had been anxiously awaiting him, and meeting him at the head of the stairs. "Ever since she awoke she has been so strange. I don't think she knows me."

It was three weeks later in the year, and Liliás was in the balance between life and death. In the room where the prolonged battle between science and disease was in progress, there were two watchers. One of these was a professional nurse, the other was Mrs. Norton. The good that was in the ordinarily commonplace woman had manifested itself strongly during the illness of Liliás. She had even found intelligence, somewhere and somehow, to aid and utilise her zeal. Her habitual fear of Dr. Rosslyn had been overcome by the nearer relation between them, which had been established by the danger of one so dear to both. She was deeply impressed by the doctor's solicitude for his step-daughter, and perhaps surprised to find herself presuming to entertain the undreamed-of sentiment of compassion for the hitherto unapproachable man, with

whose real life the dwellers under his roof had so little in common. But now Mrs. Norton pitied Dr. Rosslyn, just as she would have pitied the most accessible and demonstrative of men, while she watched him through the long weeks of that fight, with its varying fortunes, and awaited the still uncertain issue. She pitied him so deeply and painfully that her own anxiety and sorrow—both most sincere—were, so to speak, suspended and absorbed by her strong sense of his. She should have time to think of herself after—let that “after” have what meaning it might. She had no time now, with the changed face upon the pillow looking at her with a gaze never directed by volition or fixed by recognition, and that other face, aged and hollowed, and softened, but so sad, ever before her in the long, slow days.

Mrs. Norton had exerted herself to prevent the disorder or the apathy, into either of which a household where illness, most irresistible of despots, reigns, is apt to fall. The general aspect of the dull, decorous, well-ordered house was much unchanged to the eye of the casual observer. The two sitting-rooms wore, however, a significant aspect. They were desperately trim and tidy. In the ugly drawing-room not a chair was out of the place assigned to it by the housemaid's sense of symmetry; no stray book or scrap of needlework was lying about; the grand piano perpetually wore its hideous cover of shiny brown oil-cloth; and in the old-fashioned Canterbury, the music-books were arranged in undisturbed order. The dull little back-room, Liliass's “own”, told the tale of emptiness even more plainly in the locked writing-desk—a solid article of rosewood inlaid with brass, which had been her mother's—the covered embroidery-frame, and the rows of books without a gap in them. Once a day Mrs. Norton would walk through the two rooms to see that all was right; but with that exception, their prim dullness was undisturbed.

A great stillness pervaded the house, and the noise of the traffic outside was dulled by a thick bed of tan laid down in the street; but the unceasing roar of London came to it from afar, and the watchers sometimes thought that this troubled Liliass. But they could not be sure, nor, indeed, were they certain of anything that was either passing or permanent in her mind. There were periods of activity and intervals of vacancy in its incoherent workings, it seemed to them, and a great

variation in the indications of suffering, which would sometimes be distressing and would then subside into apathy. But when they questioned Liliass, and she could answer—this she would frequently do, although without recognising the questioner—they found that she was not conscious of suffering or trouble. In the second week of her illness she had several times tried to raise herself in her bed, and on being helped and held up, had gazed about her eagerly, and turned her eyes upon Mrs. Norton with an anxious, imploring look; but, being asked for whom she was looking, and whether she wanted anything, she had answered collectedly that she was not looking for anybody, and that she wanted nothing. On one occasion she had startled Mrs. Norton by saying, when asked why she looked so troubled, and whether they could do anything for her: “I don't know. It is not I.”

They could not tell how the hours, that were so frightfully long to them, passed for her; or whether she noted the change from day to night. Distinguished physicians, Dr. Rosslyn's friends, came to assist him with their advice, and differed after the fashion of doctors, but were not despondent. The youth of the patient was much in her favour; it would be a question of her strength after the fever should have run its course.

It was near midnight, and Dr. Rosslyn had come down from the patient's room to his study. This night would be a critical one, he knew; and he had told the nurse to send for him under certain specified circumstances. He was in the kind of mood, induced by great suspense and enforced inaction, in which one takes to some desultory occupation that is half idleness. He pulled out one of the lower drawers of his writing-table and began to turn over its contents—miscellaneous papers, neatly arranged in packets. He took out the little bundles, and, having glanced at the words written on each—in no case more than a name and a couple of dates—replaced them in succession until he came to one which bore the superscription, “Hugh”. In this little packet were a dozen letters or so, mostly short ones, written to him by his son since he had been on his travels. The latest received was nearly four months old.

Was that a foot upon the stairs, audible in the still house? The doctor walked with a noiseless step to the door, opened it, and stood listening. There was no step; the summons he was waiting for still tarried.

He resumed his seat, and, taking one from the bundle of letters at random, read it through. He then drew a second from under the elastic band, and so went on until he had read them all. They were bright, pleasant productions, with more of the young man's mind in them than he was in the habit of putting into spoken words addressed to his father, and yet they had been written with a view to not boring him with subjects which lacked attraction for him. Dr. Rosslyn read them with more attention than he had given to them the first time. Taken thus, they formed a consecutive though brief narrative of what Hugh had seen and done previous to his leaving Europe for the West Indies. In the latest of the letters Hugh wrote that he would be "cruising among the islands, and probably an unpunctual correspondent while about it". His father had forgotten this remark, and now regretted that he had done so. If he had repeated it to Liliat it would have lessened the disappointment which had done her so much harm. Dr. Rosslyn did not, however, attribute Liliat's illness to her overweening anxiety respecting her lover—as he now considered Hugh. He was convinced that she had been ailing before that anxiety arose, and was inclined to regard it, not as cause, but as effect. So little had he been impressed by the apprehensions which had beset Liliat, that now, reminding himself that the West India mail was again due within a few days, he thought of that solely as fortunate for Liliat. Supposing the imminent crisis to be got through favourably, she would no doubt soon be sufficiently alive to surrounding things to revert to her former disquietude.

As the time wore away in the deepening quiet of the night, there were visions of the past with Dr. Rosslyn. He saw himself by the light of memory, as he had sat in that very room on the night of his wife's death, stupefied, almost incredulous, unable to realise the tremendous blow that had fallen upon him—"a bolt from the blue" indeed. The years that had gone over his head since that night had found and left him a lonely man, with no very vulnerable spot about him to tempt fate to a good straight aim; but, during their passage, Liliat, emerging from fair childhood to gracious girlhood, had won her way almost unperceived and unacknowledged to his checked and chilled affections. In spite of his composed demeanour, no one with the least power of reading the human counte-

nance could have had any doubt that Dr. Rosslyn's solicitude and distress of mind were keen on the present occasion.

The late summer night had sunk into stillness as complete as night in London ever knows, before Dr. Rosslyn's solitary watch was interrupted.

"There is a change," said the nurse; "she is awake, and seems quite collected."

Liliat crept but slowly back to life. Her restored faculties were for many days quiescent. She knew persons who came to her bedside—Dr. Rosslyn, Mrs. Norton, one or two of the household, and she understood who the nurse was—but she made no attempt to speak to them beyond a "yes" or "no" in answer to an enquiry. She was perfectly quiet, and slept, or seemed to sleep, for several hours of the day. Mrs. Norton would sit beside her engaged in the everlasting tating, and the silence would be unbroken. Each day the doctor noted improvement in her state, but it was very gradual, and before it had reached the point at which she might be expected to exhibit curiosity about herself or on any other subject, Dr. Rosslyn had come to await her doing so, not with expectation, but with dread.

What if, before they had any certain intelligence respecting Hugh to communicate to her, she should realise the passage of time, know that her illness had lasted for several weeks, and should set her mind, still feeble and inert, to work upon the topic which had taxed it so heavily when it was strong and active? They could not at first discover from the few sentences which after some days she would utter, that she had any notion of how time was going; she did not seem to observe the changes of morning and evening, but after a while she noticed the dawn, and said she was glad to see it. Then she would ask to have the light admitted fully, and she began to say "to-day" and "to-night" in speaking to the people about her. It was hard to have to note these slow stages of her progress to recovery, and to be obliged to wish that they might be yet more lingering; yet Dr. Rosslyn had to do this. He watched for the increase of strength day by day, fearing lest the mental activity should outstrip it, and the question which Liliat would be sure to put to him when she was quite herself again, be asked before she could safely bear the inevitable answer to it.

Again the West Indian mail had been

delivered, and again there was no news of Hugh. Dr. Rosslyn might have been annoyed by his son's negligence, without being alarmed by it even now, had no one but himself been left in ignorance of Hugh's fortunes in so far a land for so long a time, for, as he had a rather cynical way of letting his son perceive that he did not look for punctual observance from him, he would not have been unprepared to be taken at his word. But he could not regard Hugh's silence to Liliás in the same light, whether she were to be regarded as occupying the old position with respect to him, or the new one which Dr. Rosslyn believed he had discovered. Hugh had never slighted his "sister", or failed in consideration for her; his father could not charm away the uneasiness which he now felt by saying to himself that it was just like Hugh—a specimen of a young man's heedlessness and selfishness. No doubt he was going about enjoying himself, and never giving a thought to the persons who would be looking out for news of him. This would have been too rash a judgment for Dr. Rosslyn to pass, for the purpose of putting away from him the discomfiture which he felt. He did not attempt to persuade himself that he was not uneasy; but this feeling was not yet so strong as the dread with which he anticipated the questions of Liliás. The only hope of putting them off lay in her not discovering for how long a time she had been ill, and this she would surely find out when her present listless, incurious indifference should have passed away.

Mrs. Norton understood and shared Dr. Rosslyn's anxiety on both points, and was herself very apprehensive about Hugh. She had never regarded with favour what she called "outlandish" travel, including in that opprobrious term all excursions beyond the Italian cities and the German baths; and she thought of the West Indies chiefly as "nests" of fever, and nurseries for bloodhounds, so that the first hint given by Dr. Rosslyn found a ready response from her.

"I only hope he has left that horrid place, and is on his way home," said Mrs. Norton.

"So do I; but I have no grounds for such a hope. Have you any?" asked Dr. Rosslyn, remembering his own total ignorance of the nature of the last communication that had been received from his son.

"I cannot say I have exactly; but I do remember that Liliás said something a

good while before she was taken ill which makes me think she expected Mr. Hugh to come home before the time he had laid out. It was in reference to our seaside trip. She would not discuss any plan for it; she said she must leave it unsettled on account of her brother. I was surprised at the time, but she said no more."

"Then I think there is a good chance that he is coming. She may even have expected him to arrive earlier still, and been so much upset as she was by his leaving her in uncertainty."

Mrs. Norton looked unconvinced.

"Why should Liliás have concealed that from you, had it been the case?" she said.

This was a question which Dr. Rosslyn could not answer to the satisfaction of any other person, although he could account for Liliás's conduct on a theory of his own. They pursued the matter no further, but the doctor spoke of his anxiety lest Liliás should shortly recur to the great preoccupation of her mind before her illness.

"Keep her from it, divert her in every way that you can," said the doctor. "So long as she does not realise the length of time she has been ill, there is less risk."

"I will do my best," said Mrs. Norton gravely.

She had but just emerged from the shadow of one great fear, and now another, shapeless but oppressive, came upon her. The significance of Dr. Rosslyn's softened manner was not lost upon Mrs. Norton; his moods were, under all circumstances, too important to the inmates of his house to pass unnoticed. She knew that he was troubled and alarmed.

A day or two later, Liliás was removed from her bed to a sofa in her room, and allowed to lie there for a few hours. This was a great step in her convalescence, and it had a salutary and rousing effect. She raised herself on her elbow, and looked all round the room, as though she were slowly recognising the familiar objects which it contained. Presently her eyes rested, at first with languid pleasure, but then with a puzzled and painful look, on an old china bowl filled with flowers, which was placed on the top of a ponderous chest of drawers. She sank back upon her pillows, and lay motionless, still looking at the flowers. Mrs. Norton had left the room; the nurse only was there, and no one had thought of giving her a warning. Liliás called to her.

"What flowers are those?"

The nurse began to name some of the blossoms.

"I don't mean that," said Lilius. "I mean, where did they come from?"

"From Lisle, I believe. We've had baskets and baskets sent from there."

"But these are all late flowers. The bowl was filled with early roses."

"That must have been before you were taken ill. Roses are beginning to go off now."

Lilius said no more, and the nurse left her side to give a final touch of arrangement to the flowers. The pallor of Lilius's face increased; her large brown eyes dilated, her lips trembled.

"Nurse!" she said faintly.

The nurse returned to her side in a moment, and Lilius laid her wasted hand upon her arm.

"I don't know," she said. "I am confused. How long have you been with me?"

"Almost from the first, Miss Merivale. It is over a month now."

A gentle tap at the door summoned the nurse, and she moved away from the sofa. When she looked at her patient again, Lilius had turned away from the light, and covered her eyes with her hands.

Soon after this, Dr. Rosslyn came into the room, and his noiseless step did not attract her attention until he stood beside her and spoke to her. She turned to him a face from which he recoiled with an irrepressible start. The vague languor had left it; the reprieve was over; remembrance and dread were stamped on the wan features; earnest entreaty spoke in the sunken eyes. She slowly clasped the hands that were so light, but felt so heavy, and held them up to him as she said, hoarsely:

"I am sensible, papa. I will be quiet if you'll tell me. Is Hugh dead?"

SOME TALK ABOUT BURGLARS.

IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

I HAVE said that some burglaries are only such in a technical legal sense. The writer of these lines may candidly confess that he himself has been personally concerned in no less than three burglaries. In each instance the burglary was accompanied by what our neighbours across "the silver streak" call extenuating circumstances. The first occasion was in the venerable University of Oxford. Some of us had been sitting up all night, with the

intention of going over at five in the morning to hear the May Day Latin Hymn sung upon the summit of old Magdalen Tower. About three in the morning all our party simultaneously grew very hungry. We made incursions upon the rooms of such luckless acquaintances as had not sported their oak when they went to bed. We found nothing in the rooms worth taking, except some trifling potted meat, or pots of "swish,"—i.e., marmalade. On such inhospitable people we took due vengeance, "making hay" in their rooms, and reducing them to a state of chaos. We were now extremely hungry, and not disposed to stop at a trifle. One of us suggested that we might make an attempt upon the college kitchen. After carefully reconnoitring the ground, we discovered some meat hanging up in a place only separated from the outer air by some iron bars. A near relative of one of the most illustrious men in England declared that he was fully capable of forcing one of these bars, which he did with the help of some instrument. The same ingenious being grilled the meat very nicely on a fire which he extemporised in his rooms. There was no want of fluids wherewith to carry out the idea. Then we went to the top of Magdalen Tower for the music. The tower rocked and swayed in a remarkable way, but I was told that it could be mathematically proved that this only strengthened its stability. We attended morning chapel, I am afraid with consciences quite unaffected by our burglarious proceedings, the last thing before turning in to our virtuous couches. We were about the three steadiest men in the whole college, and the finger of suspicion was never pointed at us. Such is the value of a blameless life. The mystery which for so many years hung over this event is at last cleared up.

My other burglaries consisted in breaking out of houses. I was in the north, and wishing to start by an early train for the mountains. I was staying at a very comfortable little inn overnight in an old city, and on the people of the inn I impressed the importance of my being called early, and furnished with my breakfast and my bill. When I came downstairs, a little in a hurry, for I was rather late, there was no preparation whatever for me. I rang and shouted, but there was no response. What was to be done? I was not going to lose one of my holidays on account of anything that Mrs. Grundy might say or think. I opened the

shutters, unclasped the window, opened it, and dropped into the street. A very similar event befell me in London itself. I had lost the last train to my suburban abode, and sat till very late at my club. At two o'clock in the morning I issued into the London streets in search of a bed. Now let me assure the reader that, unless he has taken the precaution to assure his bed in good time, it is very difficult—at such a time as the Derby week almost impossible—to procure one. I went first to one or two hotels which I knew well, but they were quite full. Wandering along Oxford Street, I came upon an hotel which, though the doors were closed in accordance with law, was all ablaze with light from top to basement. I rang for admission, and my request for refreshments and bedroom was immediately complied with. I asked them at what time they went to bed, and the waiter ironically said that they never went to bed at all—the house was a foreign one, and a very late one. When I went to bed, between three and four, the inmates were still coming in, and restaurating in a snug little room just off the *salle-à-manger*. I am one of those unfortunate people who, however late they go to bed, always awake at the same early hour. This certainly was not the case with the people of this house. When I came down, at about a quarter to ten in the morning, all of them were wrapped in the profoundest slumber. In vain I rang bells, and called out at the top of my voice. There was nothing for it but to unbar the front door, and in a moment I was in the full tide of London life. I am sorry to spoil the burglariousness of my story, but I was weak-minded enough, both in town and country, to send for my little bills and settle them.

The prince of all modern burglars was undoubtedly the late Mr. Peace. His proceedings, after his conviction, were scrutinised with the most eager attention by the majority of the inhabitants of the British Islands. They delighted to have bulletins of his health after his daring leap from the railway-carriage, to hear of his theological disquisitions, which were slightly enfeebled by cries for a drink, and to be told how he partook of coffee and eggs-and-bacon on the morning of his execution. Like other great men, he has been forgotten; but it may be worth while to record some of the particulars of that extraordinary career. He certainly raised burglary to one of the fine arts.

Peace was endowed with an ability, a force of character, an intensity of purpose, which in any profession would have made him eminent and useful. He had a wonderful taste for music, and was called the youthful Taglioni. He was fond of natural history. He had a great taste for mechanical construction, and once in his lifetime he actually called on Mr. Plimsoll to get his support for a method of raising sunken ships. But all his highest aspirations were directed towards the noble art of burglary. He began with what is called "portico" business. He learned how to swarm up the porticoes of houses and hotels, and he had to do this in spite of the great physical disadvantage of being lame. By industry and ingenuity he succeeded in overcoming this defect. He met with more serious discouragement through repeated convictions. He was, indeed, repeatedly convicted, and earned sentences of four years', of six years', and of ten years' penal servitude. Nevertheless, he seems to have thought that the business was so lucrative that he would persevere in it, despite all risks and misfortunes. His gains were very large, his work being planned and conducted in a very bold and systematic manner. He always had a crucible at hand, with which he could melt gold, and display it in an ingot form, and without difficulty dispose of it. He must have had considerable acquaintance with the receivers of stolen goods, but though strongly pressed on the subject by the prison chaplain after his last conviction, he refused to give any information. On many occasions he seems to have taken more than three hundred pounds' worth of property in a night. Once he lighted upon a safe which looked very much as if it contained valuables. He was quite unable to force it open. He went upstairs, entered the owner's sleeping-room, found a key in his pocket which looked like the key of the safe, and which, in fact, proved to be so. That night his booty was at least two hundred and fifty pounds.

The impudence of the man was consummate. Following the example of *Mdlle. Hortense*, in "Bleak House", who took lodgings with Inspector Bucket after the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn, Peace, when the hue-and-cry were loudest after him, took lodgings in the house of a policeman, thinking that this would prove the surest place of safety. Once he travelled in a railway-carriage with a policeman, to whom he read aloud a printed bill offering a large

reward for his own apprehension. Peace prided himself on his great humanity. He was always most reluctant to fire on a man, and if he fired, it was to wing him, and not seriously to hurt him. But he was prepared to commit any amount of bloodshed rather than be apprehended. He used to carry a revolver strapped to his hand, that it should not be dropped or struck away. After his conviction for murder, he confessed that he had also murdered a policeman, and that two lads had been sentenced to be hanged for the crime, sentence having been commuted on account of their extreme youth. He said that he had actually attended the assize court while their trial was going on, and heard the verdict and sentence. It was suspected that he made this avowal in favour of the Hebrons, in the hope that he might be respited while enquiries were being made into the truth of his statements. His murder of Mr. Dyson at Bannercross, near Sheffield, was of the most malignant description. He had made himself most offensive to Mrs. Dyson, and her husband had desired that he should never come near them, and had actually left his house to be quit of him. Peace threatened to murder the wife, and actually murdered the husband. The murder was not brought home to him, he was not apprehended, and as the wife of the murdered man went out to America, Peace probably made himself sure that nothing was to be feared on that score.

After this exploit, Peace disappeared from the region of his former exploits, and, like other great men, was drawn into the vortex of the metropolis, where he carried on his masterly operations in some of the principal suburbs. So extensive were his achievements that it was supposed that they were done by a gang, whereas they were entirely achieved by his own unassisted genius. He pursued his lucrative but risky business in Lambeth, Greenwich, and Peckham. Wherever this "gentleman of independent means" set up his abode, the houses of the leading gentry were burglarised night after night. The public blamed the police, and took to writing indignant letters to editors of newspapers, but "the gang" could never be discovered.

Peace used to go out in a cart, conduct his operations, load it with selected valuables, and then return leisurely homewards. His last residence was in Peckham. He was possessed of a good house, and had

the society of a lady who was his housekeeper, and of another who was companion to the housekeeper. He had the house thoroughly refurnished. His drawing-room suite, of the best walnut wood, was worth sixty guineas, with Turkey carpets, fine mirrors, piano, and Spanish guitar. His sitting-room was luxuriously furnished. He was very fond of music, and gave a distinct preference to sacred music. Before going out on his nocturnal depredations, he would play the violin while one housekeeper would sing, and the other accompany on the piano. So rich was he in musical instruments that his own house would not hold them, and he was obliged to ask a neighbour to allow him to stow some away. So rich a gentleman, so musical, so respectable, and so particular, could not be refused so slight a favour. It was noted by suburban people that when their plate and jewels were ever looted, if there happened to be a good violin at hand it was certainly confiscated. The man actually grew opulent on his depredations, and drove a little carriage of his own.

Mr. Peace was unearthed at last by the gallantry of a policeman. Having finished a quiet evening of sacred music, he sallied forth in pursuit of his unlawful occupation. He wended his pensive way to the opulent region of Blackheath, and then went to St. John's Park, in the Shooter's Hill direction, which he had rendered as famous for burglary as formerly it was noted for the exploits of highwaymen. There happened to be a watchful policeman on his beat that night, named Robinson. This man observed a light flitting about from room to room in one of the big houses. A suspicion struck him that all was not well. Like a prudent man, he waited for two other men to come up, with whom he concerted his plans. He himself seized Peace single-handed. When the burglar found that he was detected, all the murderous instincts of the man came out. He presented a six-chambered revolver at the constable, and fired again and again. The policeman was wounded, but in no vital part, and manfully stood his ground; and, with the assistance of the other men, succeeded in capturing the burglar. Peace had stained his face with walnut-juice, and it was supposed for a long time that he was a mulatto. This disguise was satisfactorily cleared up. Then they asked him who he was. He rudely bade them "Find out!" It took them a long time to do it, but at the end of a fortnight he was found out, and his

identity was established with that of the highly respectable gentleman of the Evelina Road, Peckham. His secret was betrayed by one of the two women at his house. He was tried before Mr. Justice Hawkins, and looked very dejected and aged as he stood at the bar of the Old Bailey. The indictment against him was not for the burglary, but for firing at the constable with intent to murder him. On this he was convicted, and sentenced to penal servitude for life. He made most abject appeals for mercy, and, despite the fact of the revolver, argued that he had no intention whatever of doing the policeman any real mischief. Mr. Justice Hawkins awarded the constable twenty-five pounds, and strongly recommended him for promotion. He was forthwith made a sergeant.

Peace was not allowed to end his days in a convict-cell. He was claimed by the authorities on a charge of murder. The Bannercross murder, as it was called, had been committed under circumstances of terror and mystery, and the secret had never been unravelled, but a number of circumstances pointed to Peace. The wife of his victim had disappeared in America, and Peace had vanished from view of the old neighbourhood while engaged in his burglarism, but, at last, after various years and wanderings, the two were brought face to face. On his way to the north, to take his trial at the Leeds Assizes, Peace made his remarkable attempt to escape. He threw himself through the window. A policeman seized him by the heel, but after a violent struggle the policeman was left with a boot in his hand, while his prisoner had rolled on the foot-board, and thence to the ground. At a distance of two miles the train was stopped, and the officer going in search of Peace found him insensible. It was much questioned whether he threw himself out with the intention of committing suicide, or whether, passing through a country which he knew well, and in which he had his hiding-places, he tried a desperate chance of liberty. At the trial the evidence against him was so strong, that the jury found him guilty after a very few minutes' deliberation. Ultimately the wretch was executed.

The following narrative, for which names and dates could be given, is strictly true, and well deserves to be published. It will somewhat lighten a dark subject. The scene is a distant part of the country, many years ago, when a new railway-line was being

laid down. The "navigators" employed were athletic, hardy men, of whom Mr. Ruskin says that they can eat half-a-dozen times more than any other class. Among them there were several men of rough and even of criminal character. Several serious robberies were heard of in the neighbourhood of these "navvies". There was a lonely farmhouse on the country-side, with no other protection than the stalwart arms of the farmer who inhabited it with his invalid daughter. One night, half-a-dozen navvies turned housebreakers, and committed a burglary on this forlorn homestead. The farmer was forced to admit to himself that he had no means of defence against such a gang. "My friends," he said quietly to them, "there's not very much to be got in the house; but you're welcome to all there is freely, if you'll only do just one thing which I have to ask of you. I have got a daughter, who is very ill, and if she were to see your faces in her room, it's my belief that she would just die of the fright. There's silver in the house and a few gold pieces, and a bit or two of old plate, and a good lot of food in the cupboard. You're welcome to it all, if you'll only keep quiet and not trouble or wake my sick child." The burglars agreed to this, and a transfer of property was accomplished in a very quiet way.

When this was done, the farmer suggested that they should step into the kitchen, where he would be very pleased to find them pipes and baccy, and brew them a glass of grog.

The men readily assented to this, and they sat down as they might have done in the bar or parlour of a public-house. They talked on a variety of subjects, and used much freedom of speech. Everything seemed very friendly. Then at last our farmer frankly delivered his mind.

"I don't want anything back that you have taken," he said; "I have made up my mind to put up with the loss of that, and I don't bear any malice in my heart. You are welcome to your grog, and I should be glad to see any of you any night for a glass of grog and a chat. But, look here, you fellows; you are strong, hearty, strapping men, and able to do a good day's work and to get paid for it. Don't you think it rather mean for a lot of you to come and rob a lone father and his sick daughter? It is a bit cowardly—isn't it? Not like Englishmen, and brave men, and good fellows such as you have shown yourselves to-night?"

The men on hearing this became rather shy and ashamed, and looked at each other gruefully. At last one of them said :

"Bill, let us give him back the things and have done with it."

Thereupon all the men proceeded to disgorge their plunder. They became good friends with the farmer, and on several occasions had a glass of grog with him. They told him that they would never rob him themselves, or allow any others to do so. They constituted themselves, in fact, a kind of police over him and his effects, and none of their rough comrades ever meddled with the farmer.

Other narratives of this kind are not lacking.

A very touching story is told of a widow lady who was one night nursing her sick child, when, hearing a noise in the next room, she stepped in and found the gas lit, and two burglars engaged in forcing open the bureau. The one thought of the poor mother's heart was that the men might awake and terrify her sick child. One of the ruffians held a pistol to her head, and said that they knew she had just received her money, and that they meant to have it.

"Don't make any noise, please. The money is in my room, where the child is lying sick. Come with me and you shall have it; but for God's sake, men, don't frighten my child. It will kill her. She is very sick."

The robbers accompanied the mother to the door of the sick-room. She held up an entreating hand that they should come no farther, but then a weak voice cried out :

"Mamma, where is mamma? I want a drink."

"I'm coming, darling. Mamma is here," she answered with a cheerful voice.

The mother gave her child drink, and then brought out her little roll of money which was to have lasted her a month, and the loss of which would leave her poor indeed. She looked at her child, and then stepped back into the hall with her money. But the robbers were not there. The front door was ajar, and she heard a voice at the gate:

"It's the last time I'm going to do a job of this kind, Bill. It isn't to my taste."

She reached out the money all the same, saying:

"Here is the money. Thank you for not disturbing my child."

"Keep it, ma'am. I hope the little kid will get well, ma'am. Good-night, ma'am."

I have heard another burgling story, the counterpart of this, where a little girl saved her sick mother from the awful shock and disquietude of a burglar's entrance. She was a sweet, innocent little thing, and, hearing a noise in the night, she fearlessly came downstairs and found the dining-room window wide open, and a man in the room. She asked the man what he wanted. The burglar, who must have had a touch of humour, answered that he was a nobleman, and that his favourite way of coming into a house was by the window in preference to the door. He would be very glad if she would let him have the loan of the family plate. The child said that he must be very quiet, because her mamma was ill, but she would get him what she could. She brought him all the silver she knew of, but particularly begged him to spare her little cup and spoon, which he accordingly did. The man was afterwards discovered and convicted. When he was in prison he begged very hard that he might have an interview with the child, and the parents, knowing that the man had not acted so badly as he might have done, took the child to see him in prison. He was, perhaps, as much affected by her innocent prattle as by a considerable number of chaplain's discourses. Some time afterwards a present was sent to the child through the "nobleman" who preferred the window as a means of ingress and egress.

Shakespeare truly said that there was "a soul of good in things evil". After all, burglars are human beings, and not wild beasts—except, perhaps, Mr. Peace, and a few of his kind. There must be some means of reaching and touching the human element. If you look at the photographs of burglars, of which there are large collections in some public offices, they certainly appear a most villainous set. But I know very few people who could successfully pass the ordeal of close-cropped hair and a convict suit.

"It's quite astonishing, sir," said one of the officials to me, "what an alteration a few days' difference will make to a convict." He grows his own hair and has his own natural looks, and has an air of freedom and happiness about him. He is transported at once into a new and blessed existence.

A clergyman, a friend of the writer's, who is a prison-chaplain, and has probably a wider acquaintance with burglars than any other man in the world, feels decidedly

inclined to take a favourable view of them as a class. But the prison chaplains, as a rule, are rather a tender-hearted set of men. I knew another chaplain of a convict-prison, who, when I asked him what sort of people his peculiar parishioners were, answered: "What kind of people—why, very nice people. Quite up to the level of an average congregation anywhere."

My friend the chaplain, of whom I first spoke, does not take an unfavourable view of the burglars who carry revolvers. It is only their playfulness. He regards this modern practice as only a bit of bounce and fashion, and not as an evidence of an increase of recklessness or brutality. There cannot be said to be anything exceptionally bad about them. He remarks in a kindly letter:

"Many of them are very amenable to good influences in prison—more than many other kinds of criminals; and if they could be kept from returning to old pals and haunts on exit they would do well in far greater proportion than some others."

It is satisfactory to know that in these days a great many efforts are made to reclaim the burglar and other criminal orders of the community. His only welcome is not now to be found among old pals and the old evil haunts. There is a very large number of societies in aid of criminals. There is such a society in most large towns; in some—Oxford, I regret to say—there are none. Happily there is a central committee of these societies in London, or otherwise there might be a considerable dissipation of energy. The Royal Society in Aid of Discharged Prisoners—in contrast with other societies which deal only with short-sentenced people—deals only with convicts, and from this society I have received much information. It looks after the convicts from the very first, and its intention is never to lose sight of them so long as it can hope to do them good. The convicts are much happier when they are on friendly relations with the agents of such societies, than when they are in relation with the police or under their supervision. There is a natural hostility between police and convicts which is very intelligible, and with every desire to speak with respect and even with admiration of the police, they are, naturally enough, altogether out of sympathy with everyone who has been a burglar-convict. The reports of the societies to which I have referred speak of a large number of convicts, burglars included, who have been returned to their friends and to respect-

able positions in life. It is one of the most cheerful symptoms of our age, that, although our population increases, the ratio of serious crime is steadily diminished, and that, although the number of inhabited houses constantly grows, the supply of burglars as constantly diminishes.

GHOST OR GUARDIAN.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I. THE GIRL WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS.

"THERE are shrimps which must be half-boiled before they redden," read Frank Charteris, his back to an old rough-barked elm, his knapsack, bereft of the volume in his hand, at his feet. "Bravo! bravissimo! Capital idea, splendidly put! Not a word too much, not a word too little. What a prince among writers that man was! What a multitude of shrimps the world contains! What a mercy it is there are so many people to be found willing to undertake the boiling process! Now I come to think of it, though, why does he say half-boiled? Half-boiling implies a certain timidity of treatment of the objectionable crustacean which the writer certainly does not mean to advocate. Also, is there not something of ambiguity in the way in which he states an assured and universal fact? Now, for instance, if I were to say, 'There are niggers who must be flogged before they can be made to work,' I should imply that there are others who do not need the lash. Surely the phrase would carry with it a fuller meaning read thus: 'All shrimps must be——' No; 'all' is a word too many. 'Shrimps must be boiled before they can be——' What? Eaten? No. Let me read the sentence again. 'There are shrimps——' Confound it! All the meaning has gone out of the thing. Oh, you idiot! Here you are playing ninepins with your brains again—setting up a something for the sake of knocking it over, and getting yourself a fine battering into the bargain!"

Here, with a pronounced bang, he closed his volume, and gave it a most emphatic toss a yard or so distant on the damp grass.

Frank Charteris was taking an enforced holiday. He had been studying hard for the bar, and had come out of his final exam. with flying colours. Then he had marked out for himself a course of supplementary reading.

"It is a contemptible thing," he had said

loftily to a friend, "for a man to be able just to get through his exams., then break down, and do nothing for months. His legal knowledge should be so thorough, he should have such complete grasp of his subjects, that his exams. should not strain his powers—simply prove them, show him what ground he has gone over, and to what he may now advance."

His friend had agreed with him, but, nevertheless, when Frank was well out of hearing, had said to another man :

"There's something very wrong with Charteris. Look at his eyes! I'm half a doctor, you know, and I've only once before in my life seen a man with such a look as that on his face, and he died a month afterwards from brain congestion."

Frank stuffed his book-shelves with solid-looking volumes, abstracts, digests, and such like, opened the most dry-as-dust of them all, began the first sentence, and caught at its meaning; inverted it, and read it a second time, and, strange to say, found it meant exactly the opposite of what he had at first supposed; re-inverted it, and tried to put its original meaning into it, and, strangest thing of all, found that meaning it had none; the words called up no ideas whatever to his mind.

He closed his volume, and went to his looking-glass. In it he saw a fair, well-featured face; a broad, white forehead surmounted by curly brown hair; and a pair of blue eyes with an odd, feverish, wandering look in them—the look, in fact, that had disconcerted his friend. He shook his fist at himself, anathematised his own weak head and nerves, walked straight out of the house, and called upon the first doctor whose name shone resplendent on a brass plate.

The doctor smiled at him blandly.

"Torpid and weakened brain, my friend," he said. "The inevitable reaction from its over-exertion. You have just pulled yourself up on the brink of a long illness. Quit the legal and go in for the pastoral—in other words, tramp it across country to your people in the south. Look up your friends as you go along. Rest your brain; work your body; eat plenty of good food; and recreate your mind, as the Americans say, on any of the shilling volume rubbish you can find upon the bookstalls."

So Frank locked up his bookcase, packed his knapsack, and set off on foot towards the southern counties, going on an average from ten to fifteen miles daily.

And, possibly by way of playing off a

practical joke upon himself, he took for his mental recreation and pabulum a volume of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*—the identical volume which he had cast with such disgust a yard from him on the damp turf.

It is all very well for the poet to sing the glories of "an empty sky, a world of heather". Something of the nimbus of the said sky and heather is owing not a doubt to the journeying along "together", which forms so apt a rhyme and corollary to the heather. But when a man for all companionship has to turn to a volume of "imaginary conversations"; when the sky is empty only because it has been pouring its clouds in buckets upon the wintry fields for weeks past; when the purple of the heather has been thoroughly washed out of it, its ferny stems browned and well-worn down by fog-wrapped November's heavy tread; things wear a different aspect, and their halo disappears. Under such circumstances a man is apt to say to himself: "Let me see, who do I know within ten miles of this dead-and-alive heath?" and to hail with delight even the whistle of a ploughboy at the tail of his plough, knowing that it heralds the approach of a human being.

Frank did so, at any rate. Cudgelling his brains to think whereabouts in the neighbourhood he could light upon a friend, he could recall only the name of Dr. Richard Meredith of the Manor House, an old friend of his father's and mother's rather than of his own.

"I know he has only lately bought the place," he cogitated. "I wonder if his name is known about here."

He interrogated the whistling ploughboy on the other side of the hedge.

The boy jerked his thumb in the direction of a red roof showing among the all-but leafless trees.

"Thear be the Manor House awaay down thear, th' other zide o' them woaks," said the lad in broad Dorset dialect. Then he jerked his head in the direction of a small gate which opened off the field he was ploughing. "Thease be the doctor's fields, thear be the orchad; there's a short way through th' orchad up to the house." And on he went with his plough again.

Frank naturally made his way across the field to the small gate. But, what was this? Was this tangly wilderness of weed and briar to be dignified with the name of orchard? Why, he had to fight right and left to make a way for himself

through the interlacing lower boughs of plum, apple, and pear trees. The place could have known nothing of pruning-knife for at least a score of years. Raspberry-boughs caught at his coat-sleeves as he went along; gooseberry-branches essayed to trip him up as they trailed across the path, claiming kinship with the tall thistles and noxious weeds which disputed the ground there between them.

Frank's thoughts flew to the overgrown wood which surrounded the sleeping-palace of fairy renown.

"It's not a 'wall of green' because it's all but leafless," he said to himself; "but, Heavens! what a tangle it must be in the summer. The doctor was always a little strange; no doubt his eccentricities have grown upon him. And I should say he was still a bachelor."

Above the ragged fruit-trees, the red-brick frontage of the Manor House showed in the hazy November light. It was a large square-built edifice of the Dutch style brought into vogue by William and Mary, and it had a woefully neglected appearance. What struck Frank most was the deserted look of the topmost storey. Not a sign of life or occupation was to be seen there. On the floor below signs of habitation showed fitfully, the windows only being curtained at intervals.

The orchard led by another gate into a stretch of what must once have been a well-laid-out flower-garden, but which was now every whit as desolate and run-to-seed as the orchard itself. This led up to an ill-paved, neglected terrace with moss-grown steps, and broken or overturned stone vases and statuettes. The principal entrance to the house opened off this terrace, and the windows of the chief sitting-rooms looked out on it; but, although here and there warm winter-curains and glimpses of flickering fires showed through the panes, the conviction grew stronger in Frank's mind that the doctor was still a bachelor. Everywhere there were lacking those minute signs of love for the beautiful and artistic which are supposed to be the imprint of feminine fingers.

Frank looked dubiously at the door-bell.

"I wonder if anyone will answer it if I ring," he thought, and really, under the circumstances, a door-bell seemed something of an incongruity. A mystic word, written on the lintel, on the repetition of which the door would turn on its hinges, would have seemed more in accord with the unconventional and fantastic surroundings.

Patience Meredith, the doctor's orphan niece, sat in the window-seat of her morning-room with a long string of amber beads between her fingers. She was a tall, slender girl between eighteen and twenty, with a very pale, clear skin; deep, shining grey eyes; and glossy black hair, which she wore so low on her forehead that it seemed to rest on her eyebrows. For teeth nature had given her a double row of pearls, and to set these off to still greater advantage, had further endowed her with two most bewitching dimples on cheek and chin. She was dressed in some dark-green stuff, with a great deal of black lace worn high about the throat. Into this black lace the feet of a white cockatoo with a lemon crest had got entangled; and the creature was making frantic efforts to free itself, with flapping of wings and ear-piercing shrieks, when the servant opened the door and announced, "Mr. Charteris."

What with the bird's wild noise, and the close attention she was bestowing on her beads, the girl did not at first look up.

"Be quiet, Jack!" she was saying; "you've put me out in my counting again. I declare you shall go back into your cage."

Then she became aware of Frank's presence, and jumped up, sending the bird with a fine flutter off her shoulder.

"I hope to goodness she wasn't saying her prayers over those beads," thought Frank, as he came forward, asking if Dr. Meredith were at home.

"He is at home," answered Patience; "but I daren't disturb him. He is in his study. Pray come in and sit down. I dare say he'll come in in about half an hour's time to luncheon. I hope you don't mind waiting."

Frank answered that waiting would be a very great pleasure to him; adding a devout hope that he had not disturbed the young lady in any way. This with a pointedly enquiring look at the string of amber beads.

Patience laughed.

"Disturbed me. Oh no! I was only telling my fortune. This year—next year—now—never! Don't you know?"

Of course Frank pleaded ignorance, and Patience had to explain the whole thing to him.

"You take up your beads at random, and select as many as you like without counting them. You must be sure not to count them. It's cheating to count them, and, if you cheat, of course it's not telling your fortune at all."

"And what event does the 'this year—next year—now—never!' refer to, may I ask?" This with a stolid look of ignorance on his face.

Patience flushed a pretty red, and began to feel that she was being led on.

"Just to anything you like," she answered, with a little toss of her head; "to anything you want very much. If you were a sailor, don't you see, you'd tell your beads to find out when you'd be an Admiral; if you were a curate, when you'd be a Bishop, and so on; and if you were a girl, like me, shut up in a big dreary house, you'd tell your beads to find out when you'd get out of it."

All this time Frank had been steadily looking at her.

"I'm sure you are Miss Meredith, the doctor's niece," he said, as she finished speaking, "from your likeness to your mother's picture. My mother has it at home. She and your mother were very great friends in their early days."

Naturally they felt upon easy and friendly terms after this. Patience told him how that she had been only three days home from school.

"Uncle Richard has been goodness itself to me, but always kept me at school—made me even spend my holidays there. This is my first glimpse of a home and home-life, and—" here she hesitated, broke off, began again, then added: "And if it were not for Jack, I shouldn't know what to do with myself."

"Jack is a handsome fellow," said Frank, trying to make advances of friendship with him, which the bird, perched now upon the top of his cage, indignantly repelled. "Where does he come from?"

"Uncle Richard says he came from Leadenhall Market, but I don't believe it. I don't believe Jack—that's my cousin, my only cousin, a midshipman, who gave the bird to me—would play me such a shabby trick as pretend to bring it for me all the way from Australia, when he had only gone into a London market for it."

"Ah, midshipmen do funny things sometimes!"

"But not that sort of funny thing," she protested indignantly. "I'm certain Jack wouldn't be so contemptible. He's a thorough sailor—everything that's noble, and frank, and generous. I adore sailors; don't you!"

"I don't know. Do you mean in the abstract or in the concrete?"

Patience thought for a moment. No; she

wouldn't tell him that she had only had a boarding-school education, and didn't know what he meant.

"Why, in midshipman's uniform, of course," she answered brightly. "What else could I mean? I told you Jack was a midshipman."

"Oh, midshipmen are too microscopic to have an opinion about," said Frank loftily.

Patience was put out, and showed it.

Not, however, by a biting retort, but by walking straight to Jack's cage, taking him on her finger, and saying between showers of kisses:

"Dear, darling old Jack! I don't know what in the world I should do without you!"

Frank was very penitent.

"I suppose it must be horribly dull for you here. You've no near neighbours, have you?" he asked, all anxiety to atone for any slight he had seemed to pass upon the members of the young lady's favourite profession.

"Not a visitable soul within fifteen miles! The darling old pet it was!" This to the cockatoo.

"The house does seem a little cut off from the world—a trifle quiet, I mean," said Frank, feeling he was speaking very much within the mark.

"Not that."

"Dreary, gruesome, perhaps?"

"No."

"Worse than that even! I'm at a loss then. Please give me the right word."

Patience lowered her voice to a solemn whisper.

"It's—it's church-yardy," she said; "there's no other word for it. Oh—h!" This added with a visible start, as the door at this moment opened and the doctor made his appearance.

A remarkable-looking man, certainly. "Originality, carried to the verge of grotesqueness," might have been the verdict passed upon nature's handiwork as exemplified in the person of Dr. Richard Meredith. In age he might have been about sixty. He was of middle height, and his unusually large head was covered with a mass of tight-curling iron-grey hair. His eyebrows were marked; his eyes too deep-seated for anyone to be able to tell what colour they were. His nose was a handsome aquiline; his mouth might have been handsome also, had it not somehow acquired the remarkable habit of nibbling its own upper lip in a fashion that forcibly recalled a hungry rabbit. Add to this habit another

equally exceptional—that of moving the entire scalp of the head at will, on an average three times in the course of as many minutes—and the portrait of Dr. Meredith is complete.

Jack, from within his cage, flapped his wings and re-commenced his wild screechings. It was evidently his playful method of greeting people.

"Smother that bird, Patience!" said the doctor in short, incisive tones which might have been beaten time to, so regular they were.

Patience pushed away a footstool near which she was standing, snatched—there was no other word for it—a table-cover off a little side-table, and threw it over Jack's cage. She threw something else at the same moment—a side-glance at the doctor, which, freely interpreted, might seem to say: "If the choice were allowed me, I'd much sooner smother you."

"Let me see; I think your baptismal name is Patience, is it not, my dear?" was the doctor's retort for the said side-glance. Then he shook hands with Frank. "Uncommonly glad to see you, Charteris. Of course you've come to stay? Now tell me all about your people at Carrow Park. And so you've been over-reading lately; have been doing your best to make a blank of your brain; obliterate the traces of nature's fine handiwork in it, and as nearly as possible reduce it to the condition of that of the lad who ploughs my fields out there and sows my corn."

Frank stared at him.

"Who has been telling you?" he stammered, quite taken aback.

"You yourself, my friend, with your weebegone looks," laughed the doctor. "Never mind, we'll pull you round right enough here. Splendid air, delicious situation! Now tell me—what do you think of my latest purchase, this fine old house?"

This straightforward question was embarrassing; more especially as Patience, who had gone back to her window-seat behind the doctor, and had taken up her knitting, suddenly suspended it to enjoy the situation.

But the doctor seemed to have eyes in the back of his head.

"If you've anything to say against my house, Patience, say it at once; don't spare my feelings. It'll most likely be your home for years to come."

Patience fingered her beads, as though she'd like to begin telling her fortune all over again.

Frank hesitated over his answer.

"It is no doubt a fine old house," he began, "but I've hardly as yet had a full view of it."

"Ah, and it possibly looks to you a little—well, not more than a little—out of repair. It's just wanting a touch here and there from the painter and house-decorator—eh?"

"Well, yes; if you ask my opinion, that's just exactly what I should say it does want."

"And the grounds, the orchard, the flower-garden, no doubt you think would show to better advantage if I were to turn into them a troop of gardeners with shears, and rakes, and spades—eh?"

"Really, I didn't stop to look about me much as I came in. There were some splendid old trees, I remember, dividing the orchard from the garden."

"Ah," said the doctor, wrinkling the scalp of his head so fast, as almost to give Frank the impression that the whole mass of thick curls was grinning at him, "I see you have an eye for beauty. What will he say, Patience, when he has seen my botanic garden, I wonder?"

"I wonder!" ejaculated Patience, turning up her eyes solemnly.

"Now most men," the doctor went on, "if they bought a house of this sort would set to work laying out a park, and pleasure-grounds, and kitchen-garden. Now what's the use of a kitchen-garden? Tell me that."

"Well, really, I've never thought much on the matter. To grow potatoes and lettuces, I suppose."

"That shows how much you know about it! And what's the use of park and pleasure-grounds, orchards, smart houses, troops of servants, men and maids, horses, carriages, pigs, poultry, and such like? What does any one of these things do for anybody, I ask you?"

"Well, really!—it's like Mangnall's Questions. Will you give me time to think?"

"My friend, you should have the answer at the tip of your tongue. They serve simply as outlets for a man's energy. If he has too much—a fact, by the way, which has never come within the scope of my observation—let him by all means get rid of the superfluous quantity in all or any of the before-named channels. But if he has barely a sufficiency for his everyday requirements, let him do as I have done—cut off one and all of those multitudinous outlets, conserve his powers, and concentrate them on one object in life. Now,

I suppose you want to know why, instead of buying this tumble-down, neglected-looking place, I didn't go in for a clean, well-regulated modern dwelling."

"My dear sir, I never so much as opened my lips!" cried Frank, amazed.

"Ah, you see, you've expressive features. Well, I'll answer your question. Ten years ago I announced to my friends and neighbours that I intended to give up my professional career. I asked them frankly why on earth I should be bothered to go out on cold winter's nights because John Jones had slipped his knee-cap, or Mrs. Smith had congestion of the lungs? What possible interest could I have in keeping up the population of the earth when I think the earth would be very well quit of one half of it?"

"It's awfully wicked. It's like listening to a pagan to hear such talk," came from the window-seat, with the sound of Patience's knitting-pins.

The doctor turned, and wrinkled his head fiercely at her, and then resumed:

"So I said to them, 'Just let me alone, everyone of you, after dark. If you think you want medicine, and that it'll do you any good, come to me the first thing in the morning, and I'll give you just as much as ever you can swallow. But after dark don't dare to touch my door-bell.' Now do you suppose it was of any use my making this mild and reasonable request to them?"

"Common gratitude for the promised doses ought to have taught them to respect your midnight slumbers."

"Ought, undoubtedly; but it didn't. Faster than ever they came, so soon as they found I was talking of getting off the treadmill. Everybody within ten miles round made a point of catching fevers, measles, smallpox, tic douloureux, and everything else they could manage to lay hold of. And everyone made a point of being at the last gasp just exactly at midnight, with the thermometer below zero. Then I said to myself, 'Now, my friends, I'll do you one and all.' The old Manor House had been in the market for the past thirty years; I put my hand in my pocket, and paid the very small sum that was wanted for it, and not a soul has been near me since after dark."

"Why not?" asked Frank, his curiosity now thoroughly aroused.

"Why not? For the simple reason that a belief in ghosts largely prevails in the community, despite science and common-sense. And this old house is—now don't be scared—haunted."

"Haunted!"

But here Patience had a word to say.

"I don't believe it's haunted—I won't believe it's haunted! I wrote to Jack about it ever so long ago, and he wrote back, and said: 'Ghost-stories are all rubbish from beginning to end!'"

The doctor half shut his eyes, and looked at her.

"Ah, did Jack make any other sapient remarks when he wrote last?"

Frank began to feel his curiosity suddenly aroused as to Jack's personality. His thoughts flew to the treatment prescribed for the Landorean shrimp.

"Heaps, and heaps, and heaps of them. He always does. All his remarks are worth remembering," answered Patience, getting very red, and making her knitting-pins fly with a wonderful velocity.

"Ah, they justify your admiration for them, no doubt. Only allow me to remark in passing that, in my young days, young women were not quite so fond of expressing their admiration for young men in your frank and delightful manner."

"Young man! Why, Jack's a boy, years younger than I am. I've buttoned his collar and tied his bow for him hundreds of times!" cried Patience indignantly, her face exactly the colour of the crimson cloth she had thrown over the cockatoo's cage, and her knitting-pins going at such a rate that one might have expected to see sparks fly out from beneath them.

Her lips moved rapidly also. It seemed as though she were counting her stitches with telegraphic raps. In reality she was repeating a formula which had been in general use among the young ladies at the boarding-school she had just quitted. It ran thus:

I wish you were in the land—
I wish you were in the land—
In the land where the pepper grows.

It let off the steam, so to speak, and it was suggestive.

Frank felt his curiosity as to Jack's personality at rest. He strove to effect a diversion by asking a random question as to the portrait of an ancient-looking individual, which hung over the fireplace.

"That," said the doctor, biting his upper-lip, and wrinkling his scalp furiously, "is the portrait of Sir Geoffrey Marven, the last owner of the Manor House. It does him more than justice. I am told he was hideous to look at, through his unfortunate habits of facial distortion; he had a trick of blinking like an owl in daylight, whenever he was spoken to."

"Is he living now?" asked Frank, suddenly at a loss for words.

"He died fifteen years ago, in Italy. I bought this property of his executors, who were glad enough to get rid of it with its evil reputation. The story goes that——"

But here there came a flutter and sudden movement from the window-seat. Up jumped Patience; stuck her knitting-pins into her ball of cotton with a positive stab; and then, covering both her ears with her hands, made as fast as possible for the door.

"I won't hear that story," she cried; "it's all a make-up from beginning to end. I don't believe in ghosts—I won't believe in ghosts. It's wicked to believe in ghosts! I won't hear that story. If I were to listen to it I should never sleep another night in the house—no, that I shouldn't. But, for all that, it's all a make-up from beginning to end."

Her last word carried her out of the room.

The luncheon-bell clanged as she opened the door. The doctor rose in response to it, looking grimly after the girl's vanishing figure.

"There," he said, turning to Frank—"there's logic for you! She doesn't believe in ghosts, and she won't believe in ghosts; yet she won't listen to my story because, if she heard it, she couldn't sleep another night in the house. There's a woman to the backbone! Who can wonder at the miseries of married life! Do you want to know why there's so little common-sense to be found in the world? On the theory of heredity the fact stands explained. All who have ever had the smallest modicum of it have died bachelors."

A STUDY OF BLACK MAIDS.

ENGLISH people may lament the growing independence of spirit among their domestic classes as much as they please, but I am sure they would find black maids or helps a far severer trial.

In illustration of this, I propose to sketch lightly the characters and idiosyncrasies of three of the sable hussies, whom my mother and I engaged in rotation to do the menial work in our small household "down South" a few months ago.

Our home, it may be said, was in the main street of a considerable city, which

it fronted; while the sandy patch in the rear of it—styled the garden—sloped down to the shore of a broad river, on the other side of which rose the dense, untroubled forest. The river was an important highway, and night and day it was churned by steamers and breasted by sailing-vessels going out to sea or returning thence. Our house, like many others around us, was snowy white, entirely of wood; two storeys high, supported about a foot from the ground on four piles; with green shutters, and verandahs upstairs and down on the side facing the thoroughfare. It was a house for which no one in England would pay fifteen pounds; but my mother and I were told we had secured a bargain when we got it for thirty dollars monthly, which represents rather over seventy pounds a year. True, in summer a considerable quantity of grapes from the Catawba vine, which trellised over the kitchen, was reaped, and the Catawba makes excellent wine. There was, moreover, a prolific fig-tree, a gigantic mulberry, and a prickly pear; all which bore fruit in due season and not grudgingly. And, presumably, the facilities for fishing, boating, and sailing from the very kitchen-garden of the house, affected the rent in a measure.

Having at length done with the estate-agent, my mother looked about for a maid. Though a cheerful, capable, and philosophical lady enough, she preferred to take all risks with a new inmate rather than scrub floors and peel potatoes herself.

Rose Smith was the first of our domestics. She was a plump young negress, who concealed incredible self-conceit under a simpering, quiet manner. At the outset she had no vices, speaking comparatively. She was modest, for she went as near to a blush whenever I spoke to her as it was possible for a black skin to go, and she called me "Sir" with a melodious "diminendo", and such agreeable mild languor in her eyes, that my heart went out to her a little. When the milkman came in the morning she received him with downcast eyes and monosyllables, nor did she, for some days, go out of her way to say "Good-morning" to him. It was the same with the iceman, the postman, and the countryman who brought us fresh eggs daily. She was maidenly almost to prudishness. In the evening, when her work was done, she used to sit on the roof of the kitchen, looking out over the water, and watching the red sun sink behind the green pines. At such times she would sing quietly as a

summer's breeze, beating time with one of her small feet :

"When the boat comes adown the river,
Sent by, of all good things the Giver,
Then, happily row we towards the sea—
The great wide sea of Eternity."

This was the sort of song she affected, and I assure you that she was very pleasingly plaintive at times, and, seen in the soft after-glow of evening, sitting with her diminutive black paws demurely folded in her lap, gazing fixedly at the western sky, she was a picturesque little piece of humanity.

But there came a time—it was when she had been with us about a fortnight—when Rose began to air her defects; at first furtively, then more boldly, and at length with complete effrontery, as if she wished to declare her claim to the possession of an individuality about which there could be no doubt. One fine Sunday morning the girl came downstairs to light the stove and get breakfast, dressed in an enthralling purple cotton-gown, with lace on her bosom and lace at her wrists; with a necklet of yellow metal from which was suspended a huge yellow locket, heart-shaped; with earrings of several compartments which jangled to her every movement; with four of her ten fingers encircled by trumpery rings; and lastly, through principally, wearing such a masterpiece of a coiffure as must have cost her an hour or two of hard work to achieve—her black hair was frizzed and greased all over.

"Dear me, Rose!" said my mother, who was as often as not up before the maid, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It's account o' Joseph," replied Rose, smoothing herself artistically. "He'll take his dinner with me to-day."

"And pray who is Joseph?" asked my mother, and I am assured her tone was sufficient to stifle the soul of any English maidservant of country training.

"He's one of my lovers," was Rose's calm rejoinder, and she did not wait for any comment, but went through her household routine as best she could without stooping or deranging herself.

After a consultation we determined to permit Joseph's entrance. It seemed to be expected; and when the man came he proved to be an innocent-looking, well-behaved negro, very inapt to presume upon a particular licence.

Thenceforward, however, in spite of the most carefully-prepared moral lectures of my mother, Rose Smith ran a rapid race

towards destruction. She assumed airs of superiority every morning without fail; went through her kitchen work perfunctorily with her nose in the air, and her fat red lips sullenly pouted; and disapproved of everything my mother did or suggested to be done in the house. She worked less and ate more. Again and again I caught her in my own private verandah, which commanded the thoroughfare, making poses to entice—nay, compel—the admiration and comments (audible to my wondering mother underneath) of passing coloured men. She stared everyone in the face as coolly as a girl in her fifth season, and regularly held a very lively and noisy conversation with the iceman, the milkman, the postman, the eggman, and every other male creature who happened to call upon us and submit to the snare of her tongue.

My mother endured Rose for several weeks after this. But the end came. The girl daily got lazier and lazier, and more and more presuming, and if it had not been for her complaining of ill-health latterly—though attendant with circumstances that made my mother frown meditatively—she would have been dismissed summarily.

Early one morning, however, when she had been with us in all about three months, I woke to hear a strange cry in the house. Dressing lightly, I went into the passage, where I found my mother, much agitated, who whispered something to me with extreme indignation of voice. In fact, there was a Rose the second. A week later, and both the Roses went their way laughing.

Our next maid bore the luscious name of Cherry. She was anything rather than smart to the eye, or sweet to the nose; but one must put up with something, and my mother and I agreed that a few old clothes and a habit of washing now and then would make a great change in Cherry.

In other respects, this maid was a contrast to Rose. She was at least ten years older, with large, melancholy, brown eyes, and a perpetual inclination of the head towards her right shoulder, which impressed one a trifle dolefully. Her conduct towards the men was all that could be desired. She looked at them askance, like one who knew, from bitter experience, what sad deceivers and illusions they are, and when she spoke to them at all it was with a rather sour curtness. In answer to my mother's enquiry whether she had any lovers (I

protested against such cold-blooded barbarity, but my mother was firm on this point), Cherry stared with sublime astonishment. Not she! she said; nor did she want them, she added, with a self-betraying scorn. In truth, she did not go on the right tack if she wanted that common sort of masculine attachment. She made the very worst of her personal presence by a slipshod, bundle-like deportment, and the motion of a sailor on land after a twelvemonth's sea-trip; and nothing could induce her to give way on these points.

Nor was Cherry more of a genius in the kitchen. It was a dreadful spectacle to see her kill her first fowl, for instance. She caught the unfortunate bird, after a chase that was rather ludicrous, and sitting down upon the wooden step connecting her kitchen with the garden, she proceeded leisurely to twist the creature's neck, as one might bore a cork with a corkscrew, pausing after each wrench.

"Good Heavens, girl!" said my mother, with a shudder, rushing at Cherry, when the act had lasted a minute or so. "Why don't you put an end to the poor bird?"

"I never done one before," remarked Cherry. "I was a feeling my way like. And a fine tough old neck he have."

But, if an indifferent cook and executioner, Cherry was a first-rate trencher-woman. She never thought of getting up from a meal unless she were reminded of the passage of time. Twice a day she stowed away a quart of swelled rice, besides other viands of a very various kind. And Sundays, which most niggers devoted to friendship and laughter with their own race, Cherry seemed to specialise as days set apart for quiet, undisturbed, and unlimited eating.

Cherry had to leave us because of a chronic toothache. She appeared one morning wrapped up entirely as to her head, except her mouth and one eye, complaining of the most awful torture.

"Go and have it out, then," said my mother, naturally enough, little knowing the value of a fine white tooth to a black person.

This recommendation Cherry treated with the silent contempt it merited. She endured her toothache with Spartan fortitude, and made no reduction in her appetite. But when ten days had gone by, and Cherry was as unsightly as ever, and not a whit the more cheerful, my mother suggested that she could go elsewhere,

where the air might be drier and the pain less. It was not very nice, said my mother confidently to her friends, to be attended by a girl in such a state, knowing that in all human likelihood she would not alter until her death or the natural decay of her teeth, nor was it very creditable to have such an extraordinary personage to open the door for her visitors. Cherry confessed gruffly that she would infinitely rather find another place than submit to the sacrifice of her tooth, and so she went away, at least as comical as when she came to us.

Mercy Williams was the third of our maids—a fat, broad-faced, smiling, self-contented girl of twenty-two, who had hitherto lived with a rich old black aunt, all among the oranges of Mid-Florida. She regarded going out to service as a chance of enjoying some of the pleasures of life, and behaved accordingly. And on the strength of her opulent old relation, she threw aside all considerations of colour and caste, and treated my mother and me with a frank friendliness and affection that proved her goodness of heart.

My mother she called "mamma"; nor could she be induced to drop the term. And when she had done what she thought to be enough work for one day, she would come boldly into my mother's little boudoir, and, squatting in an uncouth attitude upon the floor at her feet, smile in my mother's face, and recount all her petty pleasures, pains, and anxieties, with a winning candour and trustfulness. Again and again my mother told the girl, as plainly as her warm heart would allow, that she preferred to be left to herself. Mercy would not hear her apologies; she was quite satisfied with my mother as a companion; and, as she said, "a girl must have someone to talk to".

Mercy came to us with high, but deluding, praise as a cook. But it was delusive praise. The girl had matriculated with her ancient aunt, it seemed, and this old lady's love of grease was so immense that for days my mother and I were in danger of being sickened by the awful dishes which resulted from Mercy's past training, and her desire to "fix things as nice as possible". She conceived one dish which I maintain to be of unrivalled nastiness—oranges, cut into fragments, and fried in copious bacon-liquor! And she loved to make the hominy with which she regaled herself so rich with the same nutritious fluid that, if set aside for half an hour, the mess would congeal into an agglomerate with the consistency of sandstone.

Moreover, Mercy had had some tuition in the graces of social intercourse. Her aunt, being so rich, had gone into society down in Florida, and had taken Mercy with her, and the girl was a most tedious fountain of small-talk for several hours in the day; rattling on to my mother about the weather, her feelings, her desire for salvation, her fancies in millinery, and the defects of her relations and friends, with a volubility that, as my mother said, she could have valued more equitably if she had been her aunt instead of her employer. While the girl was with us we dismissed our washerwoman, and, at Mercy's request, consented to try the talents of a friend of hers—"a lady in reduced circumstances who had quarrelled with her man." The new candidate duly presented herself, and was led with some formality by Mercy into my mother's private room.

"This, Mrs. Patsy Harris," addressing the black washerwoman, "is Mrs. Tom Edwardes. Mamma," turning to my mother, "allow me to introduce to you Mrs. Patsy Harris, who'll do your washing as well and cheap as any."

My mother and Mrs. Patsy exchanged bows, Mrs. Patsy completely swamping my mother with her florid, smiling civilities; and our new washerwoman was forthwith installed.

Our first real "tiff" with Mercy was about this appellation "mamma". A friend of my mother's, a Colonel and compatriot of hers from the old country, called upon us on his way to Savannah.

"Yes; who do you want? Mamma?" asked Mercy, eyeing the tall, military form with appreciation when she had opened the front-door.

"No; I don't want your mamma," said Major Budder with a laugh. "I thought Mrs. Edwardes lived here."

"So she do; she's my mamma, and here she be, moving along," said Mercy, pointing down the passage to my mother, who, horrified, yet delighted, had overheard the conversation and was hastening towards the Major.

Mercy was made to understand, when the Major had gone, that "mamma" might do very well for domestic usage, but that it would not be tolerated out of doors or indiscriminately within doors.

It happened, when Mercy had been with us several weeks, that a letter arrived for her from her old aunt, and, deciphering it, at Mercy's request, we learnt that the

old lady contemplated paying us a visit. About half an hour afterwards, there was a knock at the door, a scurry of feet—they were Mercy's—a moment's silence, and then screams of greeting as the two women met. This was a little trying to our household peace, but it was nothing to what we should have had to undergo had we not decided to give Mercy a whole holiday, so that she and her old aunt—the most odoriferous and obese lump of nigger material I ever saw—might enjoy themselves in the city. The old lady was content with this, but she had to be shown everything in the house before she would go; she took so deep an interest in her dear Mercy's welfare, she declared, that she should not be contented unless she knew all about her surroundings.

It was very late—nearly midnight—before Mercy re-appeared, and then, oh, horror! it was still in company with her aunt. But very little inspection of the pair of darkies showed us that they were in a disgraceful condition—in fact, they were dead drunk. I convoyed them into the kitchen, locked the door upon them, and left them lying intermingled on the floor, rejoicing my mother to discuss this terrible circumstance.

"There is but one step to take," said my mother, with a pained expression on her face. "We must discharge her."

But, in the morning, it proved that even this step was unnecessary. The two black ladies were vastly indignant, on awaking, to find that they had been treated so ignominiously, and no sooner was my mother downstairs than they upbraided her. They had often and often been drunk before, down in Florida, but never, in the old lady's experience, had anyone neglected to take pity on them and help them in their helplessness. The least Mrs. Edwardes ought to have done was to put them carefully to bed. Thus the desire to part was mutual.

The maids succeeding Mercy were all more or less imperfect, though none had such marked characteristics as she and her predecessor Rose.

COUNT PAOLO'S RING.

A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANGELA had need of all her philosophy, and of all the consolation which the assurances of Nancie's unchanged affection

afforded her, during the few weeks which intervened between the breaking off of her engagement and Nancie's marriage. It was indeed a very painful time, and it was little wonder if Angela grew to look worn and haggard—if her colour faded and her spirits drooped. She was very patient and gentle, and as ready as ever to be interested in the dresses and the marriage preparations; and if, instead of a bridal-wreath, she wore the willow of forsaken maidens, no one could deny that she wore it gracefully and uncomplainingly enough.

Nancie had volunteered to tell the news to her mother and father. It was a great surprise and grief to both, but especially to Mrs. Monteith. She had been so pleased with the engagement, and so charmed with Sir Noel, and so delighted at the prospect of being connected—doubly connected, in fact—with her dear Lady Sara, that the disappointment and mortification were proportionately great; and then she got so little satisfaction from either Angela or Nancie. Neither denied that the engagement was broken off by Sir Noel's own act, neither denied that he had just cause for his action, but each declined to give any information respecting the reason of the quarrel.

It was in vain that Mrs. Monteith talked, and argued, and almost drove Angela to desperation with her ceaseless questions and lamentations. The girl would sit and listen with a set, patient look of endurance on her face, but in perfect silence. And, after all, Mrs. Monteith's anger was the least of her trials. Mr. Monteith's quiet disapprobation was harder to bear, and Lansdell's cold kindness harder still. For Nancie's sake he tried to take the most charitable view of Angela's conduct; but it was his private conviction that Noel had acted rightly, and just as nine men out of ten would have done under the same circumstances. He was very sorry for Angela, for he saw that she was suffering keenly; but he could not approve of her conduct, and he showed his disapproval plainly.

So the time passed, and July approached; and Nancie's wedding-dress came home and was tried on, and pronounced perfect by her mother and Angela; and the eve of the wedding-day arrived.

All day the house had been in a state of bustle and confusion, but now the preparations for the important event were completed, the packing finished, and the breakfast-table arranged, and everybody concerned was enjoying a brief season of well-earned repose. Mrs. Monteith was

inclined to be pathetic over the prospect of the coming separation, but Nancie absolutely declined to be sentimental.

"Losing your only daughter! Nonsense, mother! You are not going to lose me in the first place; and, in the second, you have Angela still, and she is as good as a daughter to you—I have often heard you say so."

"Ah, Angela!" and Mrs. Monteith shook her head, as she looked towards the window near which Angela was seated. "There is no fear of my losing Angela! If she wants to be married, she must go to another town to seek for a husband. I don't suppose any of our Barlaston gentlemen will care to take Sir Noel's leaveings! No; I have done my best for her; perhaps one of her fine friends—that Princess di Capri, for instance—will prove a better friend to her than I have been."

Nancie started at the Princess's name, and a sudden thought flashed across her mind. How foolish she had been not to think of her before! Why, it must have been from the Princess's house that Angela had started on her mysterious mission; to which she had returned after it was completed. No doubt the Princess was cognisant of the reasons which took her to St. Petersburg, and could explain the whole mystery.

Nancie determined that the last letter of her maiden life should be written to the Princess. She would tell her all the events which had occurred since Angela's return home; the discovery of her journey to St. Petersburg—her resolute silence on the reasons which took her there. She looked eagerly at Angela.

"Where is the Princess now? In Paris, Angela?" she said.

"I think not. No, she will be in Italy now. She intended leaving Paris in June," Angela answered quietly. "I do not know her address."

Nancie's short-lived satisfaction vanished, but she determined to write her letter and send it to the old address in Paris. It might be forwarded to the Princess, and in any case no harm could be done by writing, Nancie thought; and the knowledge that that long and carefully-written letter had already been dispatched considerably heightened the happiness of the next most eventful day of her life, and went far to deaden the pain of parting with Angela.

"It will all come right by-and-by," Nancie thought, and there was a smile on her lips, even though the tears were standing in her

eyes as she kissed Angela. "Good-bye, my darling; I hope that just such another day as this will come to you soon," she whispered.

Angela smiled, but she shook her head. Ah, what a mockery Nancie's words seemed to her just then! How different was this bridal-day from the one which she had loved to picture to herself.

A month had passed, and Nancie had returned from her wedding-trip, and was quite settled at the vicarage, before an answer came to her letter. It was very short, and not altogether satisfactory, for it did not answer any of her questions, but merely said that the Princess had received the letter, and that the Count Paolo Ostrolenka, who would be in England shortly, would call on Mrs. Lansdell and give her all the information she required. He would probably arrive in London on the 28th of August, and would visit Barlaston on any day which Mrs. Lansdell liked to appoint after that date. An address at an hotel in London was enclosed; and a very kind message, which Nancie did not think it expedient to deliver just then, was sent to Angela.

Nancie showed the letter to her husband, and they agreed that its arrival and Paolo's expected visit should be kept a secret from Angela. Indeed, Lansdell was scarcely so sanguine as Nancie would have wished to see him respecting the happy results, which she confidently expected would result from the visit; and he looked still more doubtful when she announced her intention of inviting Sir Noel to be present at the interview.

"Do as you like, my dear; you know Angela better than I do, and you know what grounds you have for your implicit faith in her," he said gravely. "I don't forbid, but I can't say that I approve of the plan, or that I don't think it very risky. Write to Noel if you like. The chances are that he will not come."

"I think he will come when he hears the reason why I have asked him," Nancie answered confidently.

Sir Noel's answer to her letter, which arrived by return of post, proved that she was right.

"I should be only too delighted to hear any explanation which would put an end to this miserable state of things," Noel wrote; "only too grateful to the person—whether Count Paolo, or anyone else—who will give it. I will be at your house on the

afternoon of the 30th, and I fervently hope that the kind wishes expressed in your letter may be fulfilled, and be the beginning of happier times."

Angela was present when this letter came. She recognised the writing; a deep blush rose to her face, and she looked eagerly at Nancie, as that young matron, not without some inward trepidation, opened and read the letter.

"That is from Sir Noel, is it not, Nancie? Is he quite well?" she said timidly, as Nancie, after reading the letter in silence, folded it up and put it into her pocket.

"Yes, I suppose so, dear," Nancie said placidly; "he does not say so certainly, but that alone is a certain proof that nothing ails him; for I notice that, if a man's finger aches, he loves to proclaim it upon the housetops and in the market-places. So I think we may conclude that Noel's silence on the subject of his health implies the perfect condition of the same."

Nancie had spoken in her most flippant tones, but there were tear-drops standing in her eyes, and she turned hastily away that Angela might not see them fall.

The girl felt a little wounded by Nancie's careless, indifferent manner; and did not, much as she longed to know where Noel was and all about him, ask any more questions.

It was the first time that Nancie had ever been unkind, she thought, and her manner and her kiss at parting were scarcely so affectionate as usual.

She was sitting alone the next evening—she had many lonely hours, now that Nancie was gone, and that evening Mr. and Mrs. Monteith were dining out, and Angela had the great drawing-room all to herself—when the brougham from the vicarage drove up to the door, and a servant brought in a note which Mrs. Lansdell had sent to Angela.

"Some friends have just come in to spend the evening, Angel dear," Nancie wrote, "and as both are unmarried, and one young and beautiful, I can't expect them to be satisfied with the society of a staid matron, but must have someone also young and beautiful to entertain them. So please come at once and put on your prettiest gown, dear, and your pearl necklace, and make yourself as charming as possible, for I am particularly anxious that you should look your best to-night."

Angela smiled over the letter; but she was glad of the interruption to her long dull evening, and she went upstairs, and

in obedience to Nancie's wishes, put on her prettiest gown of cream lace and Indian muslin, and clasped her pearl necklace round her white throat, and remembering Nancie's predilection for crimson flowers, fastened a cluster of loose lovely crimson roses among the lace of her bodice. Nancie, who ran out into the hall to meet her as the brougham drove up to the vicarage door, looked at her with delighted admiration.

"You pretty creature! How bonnie you look, and how good of you to come down so soon!" she said; and then she hesitated, and cast an irresolute glance behind her at the drawing-room door, which stood partly open. "Angel dearest," and she put her arm round Angela and kissed her, "I have a great surprise for you. Can you guess what it is, and who is waiting for you in there?"

And then, without waiting for an answer, she pushed the door more widely open, and led Angela into the room.

For a moment the girl stood irresolute and half-bewildered with the sudden change from the dusky hall and the twilight gloom of the street to the light and brightness of Nancie's pretty drawing-room.

Two figures were standing on the hearthrug. They turned as the door opened, and both advanced eagerly across the room to meet her, and in another instant Noel was standing by her side; her hand was clasped in his; he was whispering hurried incoherent sentences—assurances of love and prayers for forgiveness—into her bewildered ears, while at the other side, but a little apart and in the shadow of the doorway, stood Paolo's stately figure.

His white head was a little bent; there was a sad smile on his lips and in his brilliant eyes as he watched the meeting of the lovers—watched the happiness which he had helped to bring about, but in which he had neither part nor lot. But his smile brightened, and a look of quiet satisfaction crossed his face as he looked at the little white hand which Noel held, and saw that on it the ring which he had placed there three years ago still shone.

How well he remembered that evening—the girl's fervent words of gratitude, her passionate vow, the love and pity which her beauty and her helplessness had awakened in his heart! She had changed since then, he thought; she had loved and suffered, and love and suffering had given

to her face a new and softened beauty, and a calm dignity which the face of his child-love had lacked. Was this Englishman worthy of her? Paolo wondered. Was any man living worthy of such a pure, noble soul? But he loved her, and she would be safe and happy with him!

"Yes, it is better so," Paolo thought sadly.

But even while the thought crossed his mind, there came with it a sudden passionate longing to put her to the test—to tell her of the love which had been hers so long, and to bid her choose between them. Who can tell what the answer might have been, or whether the girl's passionate admiration for her hero might not have triumphed over the calmer, more sedate love of the woman?

It might have been so. For one brief moment, as, recovering a little from her confusion, she turned from Sir Noel, and, blushing and smiling, and with a look of exquisite happiness in her eyes, held out her eager hands, Paolo was tempted to think so. He drew up his stately figure to its full height, and came quickly forward out of the shadow. All at once a sudden strange light of expectancy and hope illuminated his face. Nancie, who was watching him eagerly, gave a little gasp of surprise and dismay.

"Oh, what does it mean? What is he about to say?" she asked herself.

Angela had said that he had never loved her—that he had no love to give to any woman; but if it was not love, it was something very closely akin to it that looked out of Paolo's eyes—that brought that strange light into his face.

Only for a moment it shone there. Then, even while Nancie gazed, it faded; and the grave, sombre look returned. For, as Paolo stretched forth his hands, and took Angela's into his eager clasp, his eyes glancing downward fell on the scar which marked where Russian chains had eaten into the soft, white flesh. That mark spoke to him, if silently yet confidently. It warned him of the futility of his hopes, the vainness of his dreams! No; whatever her answer might be, he loved her too well to ask her to share his stormy life—his uncertain future! And so the light faded from his face, and his voice, when at last he spoke, was very grave and sweet, and full of an infinite tenderness.

"Mademoiselle," he said, and he took her hands, and looked down with grave tenderness into her smiling, upturned face,

"I thank you from my heart for your loyalty to me and to our cause. I pray you to forgive the suffering it has caused you, and I rejoice that through madame's kindness"—and he looked at Nancie and bowed—"I am able to restore your happiness."

He looked down at the hand which still rested on his own, and touched the ring tenderly.

"You have nobly redeemed the promise of which this ring is a pledge; but, mademoiselle," and he smiled gravely, "it is too clumsy for a lady's use. See, monsieur's betrothal-ring would be a more fitting ornament!" and with a quick movement of his long, lithe fingers, he drew the ring from her finger and slipped it on his own.

Angela gave a little incoherent cry; she looked from her unadorned hand to his grave face with imploring, reproachful eyes, and she clasped her hands round his arm.

"Oh, not that—not that, monsieur!" she cried. "Give me back my ring, I entreat you! I cannot part with that. It is the last link which binds me to you—the last remembrance of the past. Give it back to me—I cannot give it up even to you!"

But Paolo shook his head.

"The link which binds us together is too strong to be broken, my child," he said tenderly; "it is in our hearts. Ah, we need no outward sign to keep green the memory of the past there. No; it is better so. Will monsieur allow me?"

He held out his hand, and Noel a little reluctantly placed there the hoop of diamonds which he had given as her engagement-ring to Angela, and which she had since returned to him. He had shown it to Nancie earlier in the evening, after Paolo's explanation was ended, and Angela's innocence established beyond any doubt, with exultant delight.

"See, I was so sure that all would be explained that I brought back her ring," he had said.

Paolo remembered this, and now he took the ring from Sir Noel's reluctant hand, and placed it once more on Angela's finger.

"See, I was right. It is a more fitting ornament; is it not, monsieur?" he said.

And he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

Six years afterwards, when Angela was a happy wife and mother, Paolo's ring came back to her. It was the Princess di Capri who brought it. She was dressed in deep mourning, and her beautiful face was pale and haggard, and like the face of a woman to whom happiness has said good-bye for ever.

"Ah, you are happier than I," she said in her low, pathetic voice, as Angela took the ring with fast-falling tears; "for he loved you always. He gave you his last thought—his last message was to you! 'It can do her no harm now, to know that I loved her,' he said. 'Tell her so, madame; say to her that I am content—that I go to a fuller freedom, a more perfect liberty!' And then he took this ring from his finger, and asked me to give it to you; 'For she will understand,' he said."

Did Angela understand? She did not say so—she did not even speak; but by the brilliant flush that rose to her pale cheeks—by the light which flamed up into her eyes, and burnt up the tears that shone there, it seemed as if she did.

Silently she took the ring, and placed it upon her finger; silently she bowed her head and kissed it with reverent lips. It was Paolo's last gift—it is—it always will be, her most sacred, most prized possession!

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